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The Importance of Delegation

One of the most important lessons a student leader can learn is that the word leader does not mean you do everything. Communicating your vision to others and empowering other club officers and members to take an active role within the organization is important. Empowerment can only come if you effectively delegate projects and responsibilities to others. When delegating make sure the person you are giving responsibility to knows exactly what is expected and has the interests and skills to successfully complete the task.

Delegation is giving others the authority to act on your behalf, accompanied with responsibility and accountability for results. Three basic but major skills needed to be an effective delegator are:

1. Trust – You must believe in the people you delegate to.
2. Honesty - You must be honest with them in what your expectations are.
3. Communication – You must clearly articulate what you need done.

These skills are not easy but they can be developed. As you learn to trust others, to be honest with them and yourself, and to communicate your needs, you can move on to the actual process of delegating projects and tasks to your peers. This process involves assessing, assigning, availing and affirming. As you go through the process, there are six steps you can follow to be successful. There also a few roadblocks to delegation and some reasons why people resist being delegated to. Once you learn to recognize the roadblocks in yourself and in others, you can start developing into an expert delegator.

4 Parts of Delegating

There are four areas to delegating. These areas are listed below with some questions you should ask yourself before delegating. The more organized you are when delegating a task to someone, the higher the likelihood of that person carrying out what you want successfully.

Assess

- What tasks am I currently responsible for?
- What tasks should I delegate? (see below to assess)
- Who is the most effective person to get this task done?
- What expectations will I have for the completion of this task?
- How will I know when the job is completed correctly? How will I evaluate this person?

Assign

- How will I select to whom I will delegate?
- How will I inform my expectations of the project to this person?
- Follow up with the individual and ask them to coordinate the task/project.
- Here are some suggestions on how to delegate work
 - Take a show of hands
 - Ask for volunteers
 - Pass around a sign-up list
 - Appoint someone
 - Assign a task to a committee

Availability

- Make yourself available should the person have questions.
- Strengthen the lines of communication by reminding your peers that they can come to you with any questions you may have.
- If you do not have the answers to their questions, be sure to make your members aware of other people they can contact for assistance (e.g. club advisor, Student Organizations office, etc.).

Affirm

- Follow through with your expectations.
- Praise when a job is well-done. Address mistakes in a proactive manner using constructive criticism.
- Evaluate the process. Did the job get done? What can we do better in the future?

The most difficult part of the four-step process is *assessing* the current situation. Too often, leaders are reluctant to turn over decision-making skills to other people, for fear that things won't get done the right way. As a leader, you must keep in mind that sometimes you will have to sacrifice your ideas when others are delegated projects. As long as the quality of work is acceptable, try to avoid being critical of others.

In order to better assess your current situation, here are some typical examples of when you should delegate a task:

1. When somebody else has more skills than you in a particular area.
2. When an individual has approached you with willingness to help out on a specific project.
3. When someone can develop themselves by taking on a challenging task.
4. When you don't have the time to handle your other responsibilities effectively.
5. When planning takes more time than implementing.

On the other hand, here are some situations where you may wish to not delegate a task.

1. When the person has a negative attitude about the task/project.
2. When other people are too busy to complete the entire job.
3. When the project requires responsibilities members are not capable of handling
4. When you will have to change the attitude/behavior of that person

Roadblocks to delegation

1. I can do it better myself.
2. I can't trust my committee workers.
3. I don't have time to involve others.
4. I can't delegate something I don't know how to do myself.
5. I can't bring myself to delegating busy work.
6. I can't delegate to my friends.
7. Everyone is already busy.

Why do people resist delegation?

1. They don't know how to do the task.
2. They have a fear of criticism for mistakes.
3. They lack confidence in their ability.
4. They don't understand what is wanted.
5. They don't have the time.
6. They don't like doing it.

Adapted from The Art of Delegating, Student Involvement, University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Mel Hughes, Perdue Memorial Union, Perdue University, Adapted from Delegating Responsibility, Anonymous

Six Steps to Successful Delegation

1. **Clarify your goals and set priorities.** You need to have set goals and to have prioritized different projects. Be sure you know what needs to be done and how important it is.
2. **Decide what goals and projects can be done by others.** Take a realistic appraisal of what you are trying to accomplish. Keep those projects close to you that are of the highest priority.
3. **Select the right person.** Match the demands and skills of a project to individual skills, interests, and talents. If you need someone to produce a flyer, give the project to someone who knows how to make them and who has an interest in them.
4. **Organize the tasks being delegated.** Examine what tasks need to be done for a project to be successful and make appropriate decisions regarding who is working on it, the type of equipment that may be needed, finances, and facilities.
5. **Give clear instructions and request feedback.** Review exactly what you are going to tell someone to make sure there aren't various interpretations that could cause confusion. After giving the instructions, have the person repeat back what their understanding is of their responsibilities. This helps clarify roles, jobs, and expectations. Here is a brief story to highlight this step.

"Upon approaching an airport for landing, just short of the touchdown, the pilot of a military plane determined that the runway was too short for his landing approach, so he decided to circle around and try again.

He yelled to his engineer, "Take off power!"

The engineer reached up and turned off the engines. The plane continued downward and crashed at the end of the runway!

The pilot had wanted the engineer to give him extra power for takeoff."

6. **Set deadlines and ask for reports.** Tell people what the deadline for their project or responsibility is. Make sure that everyone understands exactly what needs to be done for the deadline. If you tell someone the newsletter needs to be ready by November 25th, they may have the newsletter ready for you to review by that date but in reality, you wanted to mail it on the 25th. You need to state clearly the deadline dates for when you want to review the newsletter, when it should go to the printer, and when it should be mailed.

Adapted from *Phi Theta Kappa, Leadership Development Studies*, 1995. Phi Theta, Inc: Jackson, Mississippi.